# What Testing Agencies Look for When Approving Testing Accommodations (And Why Many Requests Get Denied)

What agencies look for in testing accommodations—and why many requests are denied. Expert insights on documentation, diagnosis, and approval success.

SAN DIEGO, CA, UNITED STATES, March 25, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As competition for academic and professional advancement intensifies, testing accommodations have become an increasingly important support for students and professionals with ADHD, learning differences, anxiety, and other conditions. However, many applicants are surprised to learn that a diagnosis alone is often not enough to secure approval. In fact, a significant number of accommodation requests are denied each year, not for lack of need, but due to insufficient or poorly structured documentation.
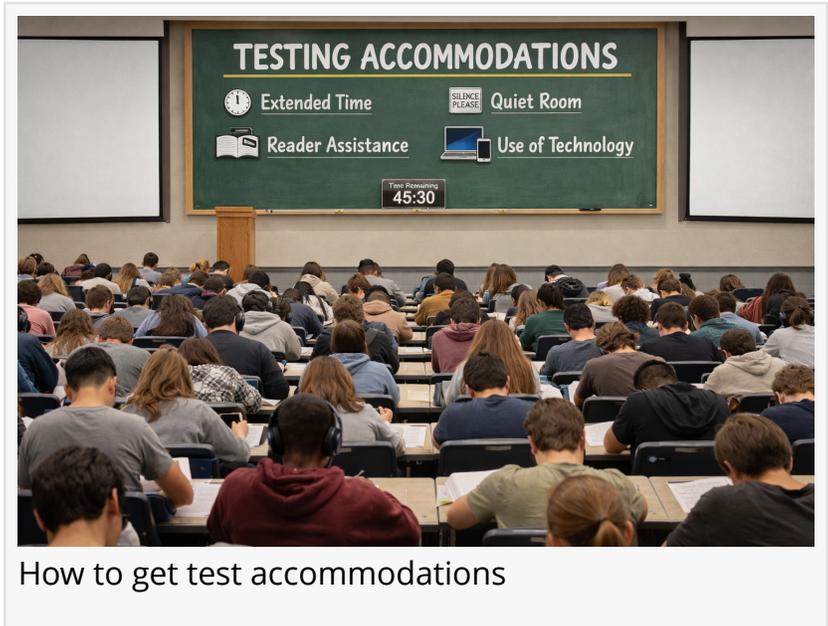
How to get test accommodations

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> The most common reason accommodations are denied is not the absence of a diagnosis, but the failure to clearly document how that condition functionally limits performance under testing conditions."
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> *Dr. Alan Jacobson, Psy.D., MBA, Clinical Psychologist*

Understanding what psychological evaluators and, ultimately, testing agencies are looking for can make the difference between approval and denial.

The Gap Between Diagnosis and Approval

One of the most common misconceptions is that receiving a diagnosis automatically qualifies an individual for exam accommodations. While a diagnosis is an essential starting point, it is only one part of a much more comprehensive evaluation process.

Testing agencies, such as those that administer the SAT,

ACT, LSAT, MCAT, GRE, and professional licensing exams, require clear, evidence-based documentation that demonstrates not only the presence of a condition but also its functional impact on test performance. Without this, even well-intentioned and clinically valid evaluations may fall short of approval standards.

What Evaluators Actually Look For

A high-quality psychological evaluation for testing accommodations typically includes several key components, each of which must be clearly documented and integrated.

1. A Clear, Evidence-Based Diagnosis
Evaluators rely on established diagnostic frameworks, such as DSM-5 criteria, to determine whether an individual meets criteria for conditions like ADHD, specific learning disorders, or anxiety disorders. Importantly, the diagnosis must be supported by multiple data sources, including clinical interviews, developmental history, and standardized assessment tools.

2. Documented Functional Impairment
Perhaps the most critical, and most frequently overlooked, component is functional impairment. Evaluators must demonstrate how the condition meaningfully interferes with performance under standard testing conditions. This includes difficulties with sustained attention, processing speed, working memory, reading fluency, or anxiety-related disruptions.

In our experience, the most common reason accommodations are denied is not the absence of a diagnosis, but the failure to clearly connect that diagnosis to specific, measurable limitations in a testing context.

3. Objective, Standardized Testing Data
Subjective reports alone are insufficient. Strong evaluations include objective data from validated psychological and neurocognitive tests. These psychological testing measures provide quantifiable evidence of deficits and help establish the severity and consistency of the individual's challenges.

4. Consistency Across Data Sources
Testing agencies look for coherence. The individual's self-report, academic history, behavioral observations, and test results should align to tell a consistent clinical story. Discrepancies or unexplained inconsistencies can weaken an application.

5. Current and Relevant Evaluation
Most testing agencies require relatively recent documentation, often within the past three to five years, depending on the condition. Outdated evaluations, even if thorough, may not reflect current functioning and are a common reason for denial.

Why Many Accommodation Requests Are Denied

Despite increasing awareness of mental health and learning differences, denial rates remain significant. Several recurring issues tend to undermine otherwise valid applications.

Insufficient Documentation
Reports that lack depth, specificity, or supporting data are unlikely to meet approval standards. Brief letters or summary notes, even from qualified professionals, often do not provide enough detail.

Lack of Functional Linkage
A diagnosis without a clear explanation of how it impacts timed, standardized testing is one of the most common pitfalls.

Overreliance on Self-Report
While personal experiences are important, they must be supported by objective evidence. Applications based primarily on subjective symptoms are frequently denied.

Outdated or Incomplete Testing
Evaluations that are too old or missing key components may not meet current criteria.

Generic or Template-Based Reports
Testing agencies are increasingly adept at identifying reports that appear standardized or non-individualized. Strong applications require tailored, case-specific analysis.

What Makes a Strong Evaluation

A well-constructed psychological evaluation does more than check boxes. Instead, it builds a cohesive, evidence-based narrative that links diagnosis, data, and functional impact.

This includes:

Comprehensive clinical interview and history
Standardized cognitive and psychological testing
Clear articulation of functional limitations
Direct rationale for each recommended accommodation
Integration of findings into a unified clinical formulation

When done correctly, the evaluation not only meets documentation standards but also anticipates the questions and criteria used by review committees.

The Importance of Getting It Right

For many individuals, testing accommodations can significantly improve access, reduce

unnecessary barriers, and allow for a more accurate demonstration of knowledge and ability. However, the process requires careful planning, sufficient lead time, and a thorough understanding of documentation requirements.

Starting the evaluation process early is critical. Depending on the testing agency and the complexity of the case, gathering appropriate documentation and completing a comprehensive evaluation can take several weeks to months.

Moving Toward a More Informed Process

As awareness continues to grow, there is increasing recognition that accommodations are not about gaining an advantage, but about ensuring equitable access. At the same time, standards for documentation remain appropriately rigorous to preserve fairness and validity.

For students, professionals, and families navigating this process, understanding what evaluators look for and why requests may be denied can provide a clearer path forward.

High-quality, evidence-based psychological evaluations play a central role in that process, helping to ensure that legitimate needs are accurately identified and effectively communicated.

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